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ABSTRACT

This report envisions Texas schools using one another as resources and the campus planning process as a vehicle for implementing research-based concepts and practices in the middle grades. Since Texas' restructuring effort will not succeed without commitment to staff development from all levels of the education community, the need for teacher and administrator training in educating young adolescents is stressed throughout the report. The middle school years have been passed over by educational reform movements focused on early childhood and high school education. Too often, adolescence has been viewed as something to be endured and the middle grades have been seen as solutions to district enrollment and facilities problems. Education at the middle level must foster individual growth by meeting the intellectual and developmental needs of children where they are, rather than adapting instructional practices and school organization from some other grade level. Major reform issues are organized into nine interrelated goal areas: Goal 1: student learning; Goal 2: curriculum and programs; Goal 3: personnel; Goal 4: organization and management; Goal 5: finance; Goal 6: parent responsibility; Goal 7: community and business partnerships; Goal 8: research, development, and evaluation; and Goal 9: communications. Specific strategies for achieving each goal are presented for the Texas Education Agency, regional education service centers, school districts, and campuses. (32 references) (MLH)

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ED 370 153

REPORT OF THE TEXAS TASK FORCE ON MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION

Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas
September 1991

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Spotlight on the Middle

Report of the Texas Task Force On Middle School Education

Texas Education Agency
Austin, Texas
September 1991

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Report of the Texas Task Force On Middle School Education

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FOREWORD

In 1989 the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century. Turning Points* presented the findings from an 18-month study of the current status of the education of 10- to 15- year-olds and eight recommendations for making education for this age group more developmentally appropriate. Carnegie Corporation did not want *Turning Points* to become just another task force report that was read and shelved. Through their Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative, Carnegie Corporation provided grants to 27 states to follow up their research by exploring ways to promote widespread implementation of the recommendations contained in *Turning Points*. Texas received a Middle Grade School State Policy Initiative grant to fund the work of a Task Force on Middle School Education.

The Task Force on Middle School Education consists of representatives of the State Board of Education, the Governor's Office, the Legislature, the Texas Department of Human Services, and the Texas Department of Health. Other members are middle school teachers, counselors, and principals, as well as district-level middle school program administrators and superintendents. The task force also includes representatives from professional organizations, community service groups, and institutions of higher education. The membership of the task force is intentionally diverse. The primary goal of this initiative is to effect policy change. Achieving this goal requires a combined effort from all levels of the education community. ✦

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INTRODUCTION

Spotlight on the Middle presents the work of the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education. The strategies contained in this report parallel very closely the goals and objectives found in *Quality, Equity, Accountability: Texas State Board of Education Long-Range Plan for Public Education, 1991-1995*. *Spotlight on the Middle* is organized by the nine goal areas of the *Long-Range Plan*.

A central theme has guided the work of the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education and extends throughout this report. This theme is a vision of Texas schools using one another as resources and the campus planning process as a vehicle for implementing research-based concepts and practices at the middle grades. A few middle schools in Texas have implemented most of the reforms advocated in this report. Some have implemented very few. Many Texas middle schools are somewhere in between. As middle schools begin to plan reforms, they are turning for assistance to middle schools that have already achieved measures of success. The task force seeks to augment this network.

A *Source Book of Notable Texas Middle School Programs*, published in conjunction with *Spotlight on the Middle*, provides information and contacts for more than 100 Texas programs for middle grade students. The programs contained in the *Source Book* have been submitted to the task force by educators with first-hand knowledge of the programs in their schools. The *Source Book* is a practical tool for sharing information on middle grade programs. The primary validation of all of these programs is that they are recommended by the school in which they are in place. Some of the programs have received state and national recognition and rewards. A middle school electronic bulletin board will further aid communication and networking among practitioners.

A reform effort driven by innovation at the campus level rather than mandates imposed from above establishes new priorities for policymakers. Providing schools with the flexibility to innovate is consistent with the goals and objectives of the *Long-Range Plan* and with recent state legislation. The Task Force on Middle School Education advocates removal of legal and administrative barriers to innovation and streamlining the waiver process. *Spotlight on the Middle* is a policy tool that can be used to provide direction to leaders at all levels of the middle grade education reform movement.

INTRODUCTION

This statewide restructuring effort will not succeed, however, without a commitment to staff development from all levels of the education community. The need for teacher and administrator training in the education of young adolescents is recognized throughout this report. Providing the training to enable teachers and administrators to spread middle school reform statewide will require a coordinated effort by schools, districts, Regional Education Service Centers, institutions of higher education, the State Board of Education, and the Texas Education Agency.

Many of the issues and strategies discussed in *Spotlight on the Middle* are interrelated. Staff development concerns, discussed under *Goal 3: Personnel*, could have been incorporated into every topic. The same is true for other issues. The purpose of organizing issues by *Long-Range Plan* goal areas is to provide greater focus on the description of the current state of middle level education in Texas and greater emphasis on the strategies for restructuring Texas middle schools.

Goal 1: Student Learning

The traditional junior high school is organized, like the high school, by subject department with students grouped in classes based on prior achievement or standardized test scores. An instructional setting in which a heterogeneous group of students — reflecting the mix of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, maturity levels, and intellectual abilities of the campus at large — and an interdisciplinary team of teachers are brought together for the day better meets the needs of middle grade students. When combined with flexible scheduling of the school day, this instructional setting offers the framework necessary to provide expanded opportunities for learning.

Goal 2: Curriculum and Programs

The teachers on an academic team can plan their instruction around themes so that the material taught in one subject is related to the material being taught in the other classes the student is taking. This subject integration, combined with instructional strategies that allow students to take a more active role in learning, helps encourage the development of higher order thinking skills in young adolescents.

Goal 3: Personnel

Teacher preparation programs at Texas colleges and universities prepare, and the Texas Education Agency certifies, professionals for elementary and secondary schools. Administrators feel restricted by the mix of grade and subject specializations required in the typical middle school. They are further frustrated by the fact that neither the elementary nor the secondary professionals receive any academic training related specifically to young adolescents and instructional methods appropriate for this age group. The dual need for greater flexibility in the certification rules and increased inservice training for professionals is paramount.

Goal 4: Organization and Management

The Texas Legislature and State Board of Education have redefined the roles of, and relationships between, the different levels of the education policy community. The middle school organizational structures advocated in this report, such as interdisciplinary teaching teams, work with these new definitions to create a framework for enhanced responsibility for student progress at the building and classroom levels.

Goal 5: Finance

Some of the most important changes recommended by the Task Force on Middle School Education require that schools do things in different ways and that agencies providing services to young adolescents coordinate service delivery. Although costly programs are not added to what schools are doing, there are some increased costs associated with operating the restructured middle school. An initial investment in restructuring and a strong commitment to a redirection of existing funds are required.

Goal 6: Parent Responsibility

Parent involvement has been recognized as a key to student success at all grade levels. Involvement of parents in the education of their children tends to decrease when students move from elementary to middle school. Although young adolescents are seeking independence from their parents, this is also a time when the need for adult guidance is most acute.

Goal 7: Community and Business Partnerships

The call for coordination of effort is heard throughout *Spotlight on the Middle*. The large number of state agencies involved in provision of services to young adolescents and their families in Texas, coupled with the financial constraints under which they are operating, demand greater efficiency through coordination of efforts. Many schools have also developed relationships with community groups and businesses to meet the needs of students.

Goal 8: Research, Development and Evaluation

The implementation process integral to any reform movement involves an ongoing assessment of both students and schools with appropriate assessment criteria. Administrators need timely access to the results of these assessments and to model programs that can be tailored to their schools.

Goal 9: Communications

Communication is the key to implementing middle school reform in Texas. Networking among schools to share innovative programs, cooperation between Regional Education Service Centers and colleges of education in developing staff training programs, coordination of state services to youth, and business partnerships all revolve around the goal of communication. ✦

The Need For Restructuring Texas Middle Schools

For middle grade students, change is a certainty. For the young adolescents enrolled in grades six, seven, or eight, the intensity of this change is matched only by its pervasiveness. These young people enter the sixth grade as children. They leave the eighth grade transformed, as teenagers facing a complex array of opportunities and responsibilities. The physical, psychological, and intellectual changes that occur during adolescence are second only to those that occur in young children from birth to age three. These changes are compounded by their context: they occur in a world of personal exploration, social pressures, and adult expectations.

Middle grade students are unique. Middle grade educators are challenged daily with a range of intellectual, physical, psychological and social development that is unmatched at any other grade level. Middle grade students are intensely curious about themselves and their world. They have a tremendous capacity to absorb new information and to question old. As they begin to experience their capacity to understand the world, they demand the privileges and treatment associated with adulthood. They are developing an awareness and concern for social issues and fairness at a time when they seem to be avoiding responsibility. Middle school children strongly desire privacy and independence from their families, yet adult nurturing and support is critical to future academic and social success.

Young adolescence is also marked by changes in educational practice and organization. As students enter the middle grades, they exchange a self-contained elementary classroom with one teacher and the same peer group for a six-period school day in which teachers and classmates change with each class. They are sorted into groups based on prior academic performance. They trade their neighborhood schools for much larger and more complex campuses that serve students from a number of parts of town.

The middle school years have been passed over by educational reform movements that have focused on early childhood and high school education. As educators, we have adapted too easily to the perspective that views adolescence as something that must be endured. As planners, we have too often seen the middle grades as possible solutions to district enrollment and facilities problems. Education at the middle grades must foster individual growth by meeting the intellectual and developmental needs of middle school children where they are, rather than adapting instructional practices and school organization from some other grade level. This report describes a developmentally appropriate middle grade education and presents strategies by which it can be achieved.

The Need For Restructuring Texas Middle Schools

The education we provide these children must meet their immediate academic needs and prepare them for their future as productive citizens. That future will be more ethnically diverse than the present. It will unfold in a world of new social and economic realities defined by changing roles of families, schools, government and community institutions, and businesses. The Texas student population has increased by nine percent since the 1984-85 school year. Of the 3.3 million students enrolled in the Texas public school system, nearly 700,000 attend the middle grades. Students in these programs reflect the increasing ethnic diversification of the Texas population. In the 1989-90 school year, 51 percent of the state's middle grade population were white, 14 percent were black, 33 percent were Hispanic, and 2 percent were Asian or American Indian. Hispanics make up the fastest growing group of students in Texas schools, showing a 3.37 percent increase between the 1988-89 and 1989-90 school years, a rate that is almost triple the statewide growth for all students. For both students entering the middle grades and the educators guiding them, sensitivity to multicultural issues in a changing society is an increasingly crucial element of a well-balanced education.

The Texas middle school population is largely urban and mobile. More than half of the eighth-grade students in Texas live in the 65 school districts in the state with more than 10,000 students in average daily attendance. By contrast, the 412 smallest school districts in Texas account for only three percent of the state's secondary school population. Middle grade students reflect, and middle schools are affected by, the high mobility rates of the state's population. In some Texas middle grade schools, the mobility rate is 40 percent per year. Middle school educators must accommodate social pressures and foster a sense of community between students and teachers and a sense of connectedness between their schools and the families and the communities they serve.

Instruction at the middle grades should emphasize mastery of content rather than coverage. Mastery of the basic skills should be regarded as a fundamental first step, rather than the end result, of education for all students in grades six, seven, and eight. Texas data for the 1989-90 school year indicate that more than 20 percent of the state's seventh graders failed at least one section of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) test. The performance of entering ninth graders on the TEAMS test is even worse, where nearly 36 percent of the state's ninth graders failed at least one section in reading, writing, or mathematics. Our educational failures may matriculate but they do not go away. National survey data from 1988 indicate that 18 percent of all eighth graders repeated at least one grade. In Texas 30 percent of the eighth grade students, 28 percent of the seventh graders, and 27 percent of the sixth graders were overage for grade in the 1989-90 school year, with Hispanic and black students overage for grade at much higher rates than their white counterparts. Instruction that encourages

mastery of course content challenges students to be active learners and connects themes across subject areas with a curriculum that recognizes student diversity and gives priority to the academic needs and intellectual interests of young adolescents.

There is a need for counseling, health, human services, and other support services from state and community agencies at the middle grades. One of every four Texas youngsters under the age of 18 lives in poverty. In 1988 more than 70,700 youngsters between the ages of 10 and 17 were referred to the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission; 1,907 Texas 10- to 17-year-olds were referred to the state's juvenile correction system. Our state leads the nation in pregnancy rates for teens under the age of 14 and has the second highest pregnancy rate for teens aged 15 to 19. Three out of every four 14- to 15-year-old mothers rank in the bottom fifth of their age group in basic mathematics and reading skills.

Family and labor force dynamics mean that an increasing number of middle grade students are latchkey children, coming home to an empty house after school. National survey data collected in 1988 report that nearly 25 percent of eighth graders are at home without an adult present for two or more hours every day. A 1985 survey in Dallas County estimated 27,000 to 36,300 elementary school children were home without supervision at least part of the time after school. This is a problem that is more pronounced among low income families. A 1989 study of 5,000 eighth graders found that the greater the length of time youngsters spend alone, the greater their risk of drug and alcohol abuse. Other studies indicate that increasing numbers of middle grade students in Texas and across the nation are experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

Research has tied school performance to student mental and physical health. On the average there is one nurse per every 1,381 middle grade students. Four-hundred-sixty-nine middle school campuses do not have nurses on site. Statewide there is one guidance counselor for every 445 students in Texas middle schools. Data from the 1989-90 school year indicate 106 middle schools with no guidance counselor on campus.

These statistics indicate a need but do nothing to dim the promise of the young adolescents attending middle grades in Texas. They underscore, however, the importance of providing an education in the middle grades that promotes both academic and social success. The middle school years are crucial to academic success at high school and beyond, dropout prevention, and labor force readiness. The strategies in this report seek to challenge students academically; foster a sense of community and belonging among students, teachers, and their peers; and create a working environment for teachers and administrators that is supported by the families and communities they serve. ◆

Goal 1: *Student Learning*

The instructional setting that best meets the needs of middle grade students and teachers is one that brings together a heterogeneous group of students and an interdisciplinary team of teachers. This setting requires a restructuring of the traditional junior high school that is organized, like the high school, by subject department with students grouped in classes based on prior achievement or standardized test scores.

The ideal middle school is organized around teams of teachers that share common groups of students. The students on each team reflect the mix of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, maturity levels, and intellectual abilities of the campus at large. The teachers on the team teach a core curriculum that includes English language arts, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies. Within this team structure, students know and work with a stable set of teachers and peers. Teachers on the team can form close ties with their students and fellow teachers, which is crucial to a child's success in school. Teachers on the team not only facilitate learning, they are part of a schoolwide effort to help foster small communities of learning among themselves and the students they teach. Communities of learning are encouraged in large schools by the creation of schools-within-schools. In these arrangements teams of teachers and students work together within the same area, or wing, of a campus. Often the teams in these schools adopt their own names and logos. On some campuses, students attend class in the same area of campus over the course of their middle school years.

Providing a common planning period for the core subject teachers on a teaching team is fundamental to the middle school concept. With a common planning period, teachers can plan their instruction around themes so that the lessons in different subjects are related. Middle school

- **Create smaller learning environments.**
- **Form teams of teachers and students.**
- **Provide flexible schedules.**
- **Expand opportunities for learning.**
- **Group students for learning.**
- **Assign an adult advisor for every student.**

— *Turning Points*
RECOMMENDATIONS

"To assure that every child is literate is my number one goal."

Mary Knotts Perkins
State Board of Education
District 8, Lufkin

"Let us focus on expanding the opportunities for all children to learn, by meeting their needs flexibly and developing responsive programs and teaching strategies that challenge them academically while offering them the support they need to experience success and achieve at their highest level."

Roberto Zamora, Superintendent
La Joya I S D

students need this type of integration. When teachers work as a team and have time to collaborate, they can better monitor educational progress and take responsibility for the success of the group of students. Working together, they can also better communicate consistent expectations for performance and student behavior. Discipline referrals tend to decrease in a teamed environment. The response of the education community to the academic teaming concept is positive.

Scheduling for Academic Teams

Teachers on a team need time for both individual and team planning. The difficulty of providing a common planning period for teachers on a teaching team is a barrier to implementing this instructional setting in middle schools. Administrators are hesitant to begin restructuring if they cannot schedule a second planning period for core subject teachers. Some schools have restructured without a second planning period, giving teachers the option to use the one planning period as they choose. This is an interim step to allow the restructuring process to begin and places the burden of restructuring on the teachers.

The amount of time spent on a subject influences student learning. Expanding opportunities for learning can involve elements of the school schedule, such as scheduling longer class periods, lengthening the school day, providing before- or after-school programs, or implementing Saturday classes. The Texas Legislature and the State Board of Education have taken the first step to expand opportunities for learning by removing legal barriers regarding time and method requirements for classes. In response, some middle schools are restructuring daily class schedules by extending individual class time from 45 to 90 minutes. These 90-minute classes provide greater depth and a wider range of instruction. In these schools, the 90-minute classes meet on alternating days on a rotating schedule.

Some schools are taking steps toward block or flexible schedules. Block sche-

Academic Teams Support Teachers and Students in Round Rock ISD

At Chisholm Trail Middle School in Round Rock ISD, academic teaming began in the fall of 1987 as a response to the needs of sixth-grade students undergoing the transition to the middle grades. There are more than 1200 students enrolled in Chisholm Trail Middle School. At each grade level, teams of four to five teachers in the core curriculum areas — language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, and reading — are responsible for instructing a group of approximately 140 students. Students of differing abilities are mixed in each team. Electives classes draw from all of the teams at each grade level.

Planning for academic teaming started in the spring of 1987. That summer, the first group of teachers participating in the team concept received special inservice training. The teacher training sessions have continued, occurring each year prior to the start of school. The training covers the philosophical principles of teaming, resources and professional organizations. It also allows teachers to get reacquainted after the summer, prioritize tasks, and develop the process by which the interdisciplinary units will be planned.

The teachers on the team are provided with two daily planning periods: one individual period and one common planning period that is used for both team and departmental meetings. The teams meet at least three times a week. The academic teams use their common planning periods to coordinate curriculum, update instructional strategies, review student assessment, and pool expertise and experiences to focus on challenges posed by the students they share. They meet with the counselors and the school nurse and plan teacher-parent meetings together. Each team publishes and follows a tutoring schedule.

Chisholm Trail is a high achieving school, recognized as an exemplary middle school in 1990 by the Governor's Educational Excellence Committee. In addition to high caliber academic performance, several other successes have been attributed to the academic team structure by Chisholm Trail principal Alan Veach. These include a reduction in the number of class failures from six percent to one percent in the four years of teaming and a reduction in the number of grade failures from four percent to one percent over the same period; a reduction in discipline referrals by 50 percent; streamlining the assessment process and referral to counselors; and easing the transition from one school to another. ✦

dules can consist of 45-minute, 90-minute, or longer class periods. When instructional blocks are flexibly scheduled, the academic team is responsible for dividing the hours of the school day among their various subjects. Teachers may implement interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, such as a social studies project involving rudimentary statistical calculations and analysis, or teach single subjects for varying lengths of time according to the elements that must be mastered. Some schools exploring this approach to scheduling begin by combining reading and language arts classes. This method of scheduling is often done in stages, occurring over a number of years as teams are formed, schedules are plotted, teachers receive training, and curriculum is redesigned. It is important to include teachers from the elective subject areas, librarians, and counselors in the planning for restructuring even though they will not be regular members of the teams with a common

Heterogeneous Grouping in the Middle School

At Arch H. McCulloch Middle School in Highland Park ISD, students are heterogeneously grouped within their academic teams. McCulloch Middle School has 950 students enrolled in grades six through eight. There are three teams with four teachers at each grade level.

Each team has a flexible 45-minute enrichment period which the teachers schedule as they wish to meet the needs of their students. During this time, special interdisciplinary units that cover material outside the regular curriculum are scheduled, schoolwide assemblies are held, students are allowed extra time in the computer lab, and gifted students and other special populations are served.

McCulloch Middle School was recognized as an exemplary middle school in 1990 by the Governor's Education Excellence Committee and was cited in 1991 as a school of excellence by the U.S. Department of Education School Recognition Program. The heterogeneously grouped teams have been in place for three years.

According to McCulloch principal Cecil Floyd, the venture into heterogeneous grouping was carefully planned by the school. A 13-member special study committee of community residents and school and district staff worked to devise the present grouping strategy within the teams. The committee surveyed the teachers at McCulloch Middle School, heard national speakers, conducted a literature review, and investigated the organizational and instructional arrangements in schools in districts similar to Highland Park ISD.

The students at McCulloch Middle School constitute a single group within each team for classes in language arts, science, social studies, physical education, and electives. Accelerated, transitional, and regular mathematics classes are offered. Before the heterogeneous grouping, there were three tracks of students — resource, regular, and honors — in all of the core curriculum areas.

There is widespread support for the heterogeneous team organization among the teachers at McCulloch Middle School. They receive training in cooperative learning, learning styles, interdisciplinary instruction, and characteristics of early adolescents. Student test scores have increased and the failure rate for incoming high school freshmen has been cut in half since implementation of the program. ✦

planning period. It is also important to be flexible in modifying teams and schedules to meet local needs.

School principals and administrative staff face complex problems in trying to devise schedules. Many schools are looking at year-round school options in addition to flexible schedules within the school year. Year-round schools are in operation all year, with part of the students on vacation at any one time. Year-round schedules are thought to have advantages for student learning beyond their original objective of easing overcrowding of school facilities. The difficulties of scheduling academically-teamed instruction and providing a full range of core and elective course offerings to a heterogeneous group of students may be compounded by a year-round schedule.

Educational technology can be used to help solve some of the problems that schools face as they begin to explore new scheduling options. Regional Education Service Centers are finding that computer software designed for traditional scheduling does not have the necessary

flexibility for managing other scheduling options. Upgrading of technical services is necessary to assist districts in implementing alternative schedules.

A different kind of scheduling barrier faced by administrators is the 45-minute time requirement for teacher appraisal observations. This requirement was not changed when the time requirements for classes were removed. As long as the time requirement exists, scheduling must be done to meet administrative as well as student needs.

Grouping Students for Learning

High-achieving, average, and low-achieving students all perform best in heterogeneous classes that represent a diverse range of maturity levels, intellectual ability, and academic achievement. Although high-achieving students also perform well when grouped together in separate classes, there is considerable research evidence that average and low-achieving students do not. When students are grouped in separate classes based on achievement, academic gaps between students of different abilities tend to increase over time. Differences in student achievement are exacerbated not only by placement into strictly segmented achievement groups but also by the different teaching strategies, instructional materials, and classroom management techniques used in these classrooms. Teachers assigned to classes of low-achieving students have lower expectations for the success of the students in those classes. Moreover, racial and ethnic minorities tend to be overrepresented in the low-achieving classes.

Research indicates that the instructional practices and curricular content used in successful heterogeneous classes closely resemble those found in high-ability classes. Students in heterogeneous classes have better developed social skills, higher levels of self-esteem, and are less likely to drop out of school than students grouped in classes by previously demonstrated academic ability. Teachers need to be trained in the instructional practices and techniques that work in heterogeneous classrooms, as well as in reteaching strategies and addressing the wide range of learning styles that exist in these arrangements. Teachers trained to recognize and teach across a wide range of student learning styles can accommodate the mix of abilities in heterogeneous classrooms in part through variations in their instructional delivery. A heterogeneous learning environment, combined with teaching strategies geared to the strengths of individual children within these classes, best meets the needs of all middle school students.

" Every day we see how important academic teaming is to the development of the middle school child. We are also able to see that interest in academic teaming is growing every day in districts around the state. "

Alan Veach, Principal
Chisholm Trail
Middle School
Round Rock I S D

Many special program requirements, such as ongoing training for staff and orientation for parents of gifted students, are relevant for all students in the middle grades. The needs of special student populations can be met in heterogeneous learning environments that address instructional needs and opportunities for enrichment through flexible grouping strategies rather than classes that separate students by ability. Program requirements do not dictate separating special-needs

Enrichment Center Provides Interdisciplinary Instruction, Remediation, and Community Support for Potential Dropouts

The Southwest Enrichment Center serves 120 at-risk students in San Antonio's Southwest ISD. The center provides intense, accelerated remediation for the students who meet the state at-risk criteria of being two or more years behind grade level. According to principal Laura Yzaguirre, the expectation that the students enrolled in the center will proceed through high school to graduation is the foundation of the school's effort.

The student-teacher ratio at Southwest Enrichment Center is 20-1. A primary feature of the educational program at the center is an interdisciplinary archeology curriculum developed by the school district in conjunction with the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio. The purpose of the curriculum is to stimulate student interest and demonstrate the application of lessons learned in school.

The teachers received inservice training on the characteristics of at-risk students from Southwest ISD's at-risk coordinator and special training in archeology from the Center for Archaeological Research. The Center for Archaeological Research also provides the school with materials, curriculum suggestions, student workshops, and field trip opportunities. Other instructional support is provided by public television station KLRN and the Institute of Texan Cultures. The National Park Service hosts student tours of the mission sites in the San Antonio area, emphasizing archaeological surveys in progress. Some students are able to work summer jobs at the missions in the San Antonio area through partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Other programs and facilities are in place at the enrichment center to ensure student success. A computer lab with content area software provides each student with daily self-paced computer instruction. Sixth grade students at the center participate in a mentorship program with the Kelly Air Force Base Electronic Security Command. The Kelly Air Force Base mentorship, in which a mentor spends one hour a week with a student, has received commendation from President Bush as part of the 1,000 Points of Light initiative. In another program at the enrichment center, the Valued Youth Partnership, seventh and eighth grade students tutor at-risk students in a neighboring elementary school. The Valued Youth Partnership is supported by San Antonio's Coca Cola Bottling Company.

The Southwest Enrichment Center is a parental choice school, serving students from across the school district. This parental contact and support of the center's educational program is critical for the success of the students. ✦

students from their peers in the educational mainstream. However, the requirement that special programs supplement the services provided by the regular education program can present an obstacle to schools attempting to implement heterogeneous grouping schoolwide. Schoolwide implementation of strategies that have demonstrated improved performance for all students may not satisfy traditional interpretations of program requirements for special populations. State Board of Education rules that directly or indirectly contribute to tracking students by ability level give this practice an unintended source of legitimacy.

Advisory Programs and Counseling in the Restructured Middle School

Assigning an adult advisor to each student is another important component of the middle school. In an advisory program each adult on campus conducts an advisory period with a small group of students. An effort is made to keep the advisory classes as small as possible by including as many adults as possible in the assignment. The advisor serves as a mentor and may serve as the primary link between the school, parents, and guidance counselors.

The advisory program complements the school guidance program by providing students daily interaction with an adult mentor, but does not replace the need for guidance counselors. The guidance counselor provides group guidance, personal counseling, consultation, coordination, and assessment. The advisory program is used to promote successful academic habits, interpersonal relations, self-esteem, and healthy lifestyles. About 100 Texas middle schools are without a guidance counselor. Most of these are in small, poor school districts. In those schools where counselors are available, the ratio is as high as 1,000 students to one counselor. A ratio of 300 to one is recommended.

Advisory periods, teacher-student teams, administrative arrangements that replicate small learning environments, and expanded opportunities for learning are important components in early intervention for dropout prevention. In the 1989-90 school year nearly 12,000 students dropped out of the seventh and eighth grades in Texas. Even more disturbing is that over 21,000 students dropped out of the ninth grade during that school year. The reasons that lead up to a student's decision to drop out of school are complex and often develop over a period of years. Early intervention, delivered in part through appropriately altered instructional arrangements and teaching strategies, is a key element in preventing school dropouts.

“The unique developmental age of middle school students makes counseling critical.”

Jesus Juarez, Counselor
Christen Middle School
Laredo I S D

"Grouping students for learning means offering an enriched curriculum to all students, not teaching to the level of the slowest learner."

José A. López, Director
Middle/Junior High School
Programs and Services, Austin I S D

Advisory Programs: Multifaceted and Responsive to Local Needs

Advisory programs can incorporate a number of activities in encouraging relationships between students and adults and enhancing relationships between students and their peers. In some configurations, students in advisory periods work with the same teacher throughout their years in middle school. In these schools, an advisor might teach a sixth-grade advisory period in the 1989-90 school year, following that group into seventh grade in 1990-91, and eighth grade in 1991-92. In another configuration, the students in an advisory period stay with the same advisor throughout their middle school years but are drawn from different grades. In these classes older students serve as peer mentors and tutors for the younger students as they move through middle school.

To further enhance the concept of community fostered in advisory periods, some schools organize teams for intramurals and academic competitions on the basis of the advisory class. In some schools this step is taken further, with student pictures in the school yearbook organanized by advisory period rather than alphabetically.

Advisory periods provide for the discussion and development of decision-making skills. In many instances, advisory periods are based upon "scripts" developed by school advisory committees. The scripts change daily. The schedule and sequence of the scripts can be chosen by a school's academic team. The scripts provide academic, personal, and social guidance, and can be designed to provide students with opportunities to discuss current events.

In some schools, an advisory period is used to provide students with silent reading time. Advisories are also used to facilitate the scheduling of club meetings and as an opportunity to tie into other school events. These periods provide a unique mix of opportunities for developmental guidance, academic support, and the nurturing of the relationship between students and their peers and the adults on campus. ✦

Texas Strategies for Goal 1: *Student Learning*

For the Legislature:

1.1 Repeal restrictive statutes relating to services to special populations that directly or indirectly contribute to tracking students based on prior achievement.

For the State Board of Education:

1.2 Amend rules to encourage school districts to develop heterogeneous learning environments to meet the needs of special student populations within the educational mainstream. Remove barriers to school-wide implementation of programs that are successful for regular students as well as for targeted groups. Repeal rules that directly or indirectly contribute to tracking.

1.3 Extend the repeal of time requirements for classes to all sections of the Texas Administrative Code.

For Regional Education Service Centers:

1.4 Bring together representatives of schools and the Regional Education Service Centers to develop requirements for scheduling software that meets the flexibility demands of block and modified block scheduling, extended school day, extended school year, and year-round schools.

For School Districts and Campuses:

1.5 Through the campus planning process, develop annual local objectives for fully implementing all of the goals of restructuring the instructional setting of middle schools to meet the needs of all students. ✦

"When a team of teachers has a common group of students, the teachers are in a better position to identify and respond to special learning needs in a coordinated and more meaningful way."

Catherine Clark, Managing Director
Texas Center for Educational Research

Goal 2: *Curriculum and Programs*

The middle school curriculum envisioned by the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education encourages critical thinking and is developmentally appropriate. It challenges middle grade students across a range of subjects and helps prepare them for success in high school and successful integration into the increasingly diverse, information-driven global economy.

Developmentally Appropriate Instruction

Organizing teachers into teams and changing class scheduling patterns will not produce improvements in student learning and achievement unless they are accompanied by changes in instructional practice. At the middle grades, developmentally appropriate instruction promotes active learning strategies that engage students across a range of auditory, visual, and tactile modes of instruction. Teachers using these instructional practices in the classroom move students away from the passive acquisition of facts toward the critical application of ideas to problems. Teachers become facilitators of knowledge rather than providers of lessons. In an effort to link the structured learning environment in the elementary classroom to the goal of independent learning, classroom activities shift from listening to lectures, copying chalkboards, filling in worksheets, and taking tests to participation in class discussion, questioning, and choosing options. Students are encouraged to exercise responsibility for learning and to apply the concepts and ideas learned in one subject to those being taught in their other classes.

The ability to make these links across subjects is central to developing the critical thinking and problem-solving skills emphasized by the state curriculum and crucial to participation in an information economy

- **Teach young adolescents to think critically.**
- **Integrate subject matter across disciplines.**
- **Teach young adolescents to develop healthy lifestyles.**
- **Teach young adolescents to be active citizens.**

— Turning Points
RECOMMENDATIONS

“Middle grade students should pursue a common, comprehensive, academically-oriented core curriculum that is appropriate to their academic needs and intellectual interests, regardless of primary language or ethnic background.”

Jo Shaw Kiley, Asst Director
Middle Level Education
Fort Worth I S D

Earthnauts Take an Interdisciplinary Approach to Science

The Earthnauts Biodome Project at Porter Middle School in Austin ISD is a three-year interdisciplinary environmental science curriculum that centers around the study of agricultural and aquatic systems housed at the school in a geodesic dome. Porter Middle School serves nearly 1100 sixth- through eighth-grade students. The program began in 1986 with the assistance of the school's Adopt-A-School partners. It has been sustained by a Christa McAuliffe Fellowship. Teachers at Porter Middle School spent one year researching and developing the course before it was offered.

The course curriculum provides progressive activities for grades six, seven, and eight, emphasizing a hands-on approach to agriculture, botany, chemistry, hydroponics, aquaculture, and geometric principles used in the construction of geodesic domes. As the program has developed, students have had a hand in developing the course goals and objectives. Cooperative learning is a central element of the course.

Sixth graders enter the course through an Environmental Science course, in which they learn about systems and cycles, habitats, and human impact on the environment. Seventh-grade students who show an interest in further study in these subjects participate in an introductory Scientific Inquiry/Ecology course. In this class the students study global systems and the impact of agriculture, alternative self-sustaining food production, basic geodesics, hydroponics and aquaculture, wind and solar power, and composting. The students engage in basic plant growth research, experimenting with a variety of growing media.

In the eighth grade, the students operate a hydroponics/aquaculture research station within the biodome. The curriculum emphasizes the study of systems; each student has a particular area of responsibility for the operation of the research station. This approach emphasizes teamwork and cooperative problem solving, since errors and successes in one area impact all of the other system components. ✦

characterized by its reliance on higher order thinking skills. Middle school students often have difficulty making these links. In middle schools in which students and teachers are grouped into teams and in which teachers have a common planning period, teachers can foster this application of concepts and ideas by coordinating curriculum objectives or planning instruction around themes. In these thematic or interdisciplinary units, the lessons in one subject are related to the material being taught in the other classes taken by the student.

At the heart of the state mandated well-balanced curriculum is a series of essential elements that must be mastered in each course of study. Each course meeting for the equivalent of at least one class period of academically engaged time per day during the school year constitutes a subject unit, while a one-half unit course meets for the equivalent of at least one class period of academically engaged time per day during a semester. Only the basic subject units, as specified in the state's well-balanced curriculum, are required for all middle grade students. If a unit is taught, however, it must provide coverage of all of the associated essential elements. Students in the seventh and eighth grades must take a total of 12 required and elective units.

Teachers, individually or in teams, prepare daily lesson plans. The lessons must incorporate the essential elements adopted by the State Board of Education that must be mastered in each subject. They also must adhere to local curriculum and program guidelines prepared at the district or campus level. Local guidelines

are usually based on the state curriculum frameworks that outline the essential elements to be mastered in each subject and the state guidebooks for program adaptations for special populations. In planning interdisciplinary thematic units in mixed-ability classes, the subject and program organization of the available curriculum and program materials provides little assistance. Interdisciplinary planning for the success of all students can take many forms. The Texas Education Agency is in the process of developing a set of common definitions of interdisciplinary planning as part of a guidebook for teachers.

An ongoing review of the curriculum content is done at the Texas Education Agency in conjunction with the six-year textbook adoption cycle. In addition, major revisions that go beyond updating are undertaken as necessary. The updated essential elements are incorporated into the textbook proclamation, which is the annual announcement of subjects and grades for which new textbooks will be adopted in the upcoming cycle. Recent changes in the rules covering textbook format open the door to publishers of electronic instructional media systems. Although the content of any individual textbook is dictated by the essential elements for the subject, the electronic format may provide greater flexibility in organizing material by thematic units. The newly created technology fund should allow more school districts to explore the options provided by new technology.

Computer-based methods for teaching and assessing learning are especially appropriate for students in the middle grades. Computers allow an interactive, hands-on approach to teaching in the classroom. In addition, concepts such as time and motion that are difficult for middle grade students to understand are particularly well suited to computer simulation.

Curriculum content must also reflect the increasingly diverse and evolving social dynamics associated with the increasingly visible presence of black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans in schools. This is particularly relevant in Texas as the minority population becomes a majority in the public schools. Curriculum, especially in the state of Texas, should include multicultural components. The curriculum has historically treated the impact of minority groups marginally by relegating their rich and complex histories to topical sections in courses, chapters in books, or brief discussions. A multicultural approach recognizes the contributions of each group to the development of current American society by including the perspectives of minority groups throughout the curriculum. An understanding of the important and substantial part that ethnic issues and minority groups have had in shaping our nation will facilitate a more sophisticated understanding of the integral role that minority groups play today.

“This is not a minority problem; it’s a problem. Our task is to transform the atmosphere and operations of schools to meet each child’s needs, regardless of their family’s circumstances.”

Joseph Drayton, Director
Student Attendance
Houston I S D

The middle school years are a time of important physiological and mental development that is accompanied by intense curiosity. Exploratory elective courses can introduce these students to the range of activities and opportunities open to them, and about which they will need to make academic decisions in high school. The well-balanced curriculum for sixth grade students allows for exploratory elective and physical education courses. The requirement that a unit meet for the entire semester in seventh and eighth grades impedes development and diversity of such courses for these grades.

There is a great need for life skills and health education information at this time in the lives of middle school students, both to explain the changes they are experiencing and guide them toward healthy lifestyles. The health curriculum covers personal health and safety concepts that involve interaction between individuals, and concepts that affect the well-being of people collectively. Recent changes emphasize topics such as drug-use, including alcohol and tobacco prevention education, sex and HIV/AIDS education, and school-age pregnancy education. A separate health course is not required if all of the elements are integrated into other courses.

There is a need for greater emphasis on self-esteem, social responsibility, and individual health and safety in the program curriculum for middle schools. This need could be met through small group advisory programs. The consensus is that small

Writing Across the Curriculum

Writing Across the Curriculum has been in place in Teague Middle School in Aldine ISD since the 1987 school year. Teague Middle School has nearly 1000 students enrolled in grades six through eight. The objectives of the program include enhancing students' understanding of content areas and improving their higher level thinking skills through the writing process.

Every teacher at Teague is involved in the Writing Across the Curriculum program. English teachers are responsible for teaching students writing techniques while the other content area teachers reinforce these techniques within their subjects. Students write persuasive, instructional, descriptive, and classificatory papers in each subject.

The principal of Teague Middle School, Sue Wooten, has tied the goals of the program to the campus improvement plan. The head of the English department provides training in the program to all of the teachers on the campus, and conducts ongoing meetings with the heads of each content area. The training covers program goals; TAAS test writing objectives; writing strategies, topics and formats; and scoring procedures.

The English teachers are on a writing schedule that is three to four weeks ahead of the content teachers' schedule to ensure that students have been exposed to the skills essential to each writing unit. The teachers in the content areas have six weeks to complete each writing assignment. One of Teague's assistant principals monitors the completion of each writing assignment.

Scores on the TEAMS test show an increase from 89 percent passing in 1987 to 98 percent passing in 1990. Ninety-nine of the Teague students taking the TAAS composition test in 1990 passed. The teachers at Teague indicate that the writing process has improved both student writing skills and understanding of content areas. ✦

group advisory periods should not involve preparation of lesson plans by teachers. Most schools that have implemented these programs, however, rely upon outlines to lead and focus discussion. There is a growing trend to include hands-on activities in advisory classes.

An important part of the education of young adolescents is teaching them to be active citizens. All students should be offered the opportunity and encouraged to belong to something. The middle grades are an ideal time for schools to begin youth service programs. Youth service is supervised activity that teaches students citizenship values by helping others in the school or community. Opportunities for participation can also be provided through intramural activities.

Activities that emphasize competition, exclusion, and recognition of a few select students are inappropriate for young adolescents. This is especially true when the selection is based on physical characteristics. Competitive interscholastic athletic programs and the cheerleader squads associated with them are the most visible examples of these activities. Some middle schools have restructured these activities to better meet the needs of middle school students by allowing all students to participate on athletic teams or cheerleader squads.

"The hardest thing to do is to convince everyone that we must raise expectations for student achievement, behavior, and attendance."

Bonnie Lesley, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Waco I S D

Geography, Geology and Social Studies Combined in Culberson County ISD

At Van Horn Junior High School in Culberson County ISD, a one-semester interdisciplinary environmental studies course has been designed that links geology, geography, culture and history. The course is offered as an elective to seventh and eighth graders. Van Horn Junior High School has 95 students in grades seven and eight.

Students in the course learn about the local ecology and geographical landmarks; the geology of the Chihuahuan Desert; the history of the American Indian tribes that lived in the area; Spanish exploration, trade, and settlement; and Anglo settlement. The curriculum also addresses the mythology and legends of the various ethnic groups that have settled in the area, important contributors to the history and culture of the Southwestern United States, and citizenship.

The students in the course are introduced to a number of topics through guest speakers. The Soil Conservation Service is developing a field project for the course. Students in the class have engaged in recording local and personal histories of the people that live in the district.

The program acts as a hub for the entire student population. Students are heterogeneously grouped within the course. All 95 students in Van Horn Junior High have taken the course. ✦

Texas Strategies for Goal 2: *Curriculum and Programs*

For the State Board of Education:

2.1 Restructure the middle grade curriculum to (1) provide a definition of a core of common knowledge that reflects a well-balanced curriculum for the middle grades based on the essential elements in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies; (2) heighten cultural literacy throughout the curriculum; (3) emphasize mastery instead of coverage; (4) provide greater emphasis on self-esteem, social responsibility, and growth; and (5) offer greater flexibility in preparing interdisciplinary thematic units and developing exploratory courses. Provide textbook publishers with the opportunity to submit interdisciplinary or thematic instructional materials for this curriculum.

For the Texas Education Agency:

2.2 Design program guidelines and a curriculum framework for the middle grades to facilitate planning for thematic units and teaching mixed-ability classes. Prepare outlines for model lessons that include hands-on activities appropriate for advisory groups.

For School Districts and Campuses:

2.3 Provide opportunities for all students to participate in activities that promote healthful physical and social development by encouraging intramural and youth service activities in middle schools.

2.4 Emphasize participation, team building, and development of skills rather than competition in interscholastic sports. ✦

Goal 3: *Personnel*

Through teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities and ongoing inservice training, middle school teachers can become experts in teaching young adolescents. Currently, prospective middle school teachers are not prepared to teach at the middle grades. Nationwide, colleges and universities prepare teachers for careers in early childhood, elementary, secondary, or special education. A survey of middle grade teachers in one state found that they felt inadequately prepared in college to teach in the middle grades. These teachers rated such areas of teacher education as the psychology and nature of early adolescents, intellectual and physical needs and characteristics of early adolescents, classroom management and discipline, and teaching methods appropriate to the middle school as highly valuable.

For the most part, this situation is echoed in the college and university classrooms in Texas. Texas offers an elementary certification for teachers through grades six or eight and a secondary certification for teachers in grades six through twelve. The typical middle school grade configuration is six through eight. One difference between the two certifications is the increased course credits in specific subjects required for the secondary certification.

Need for Flexibility in Teacher Assignment

One common recommendation expressed to the task force was the need for flexibility in teacher assignments in middle schools. The mix of certificates that cover grades six through eight often results in a staff that is not eligible to teach across the range of grades. Middle schools that have reorganized from subject departments to academic

- **Develop expert teachers for young adolescents.**

— Turning Points
RECOMMENDATION

“We asked middle school students what they need in teachers. They said ones who really listen and care for them.”

Jane Stallings, Dean
College of Education
Texas A & M University

"Programs at the middle grades should encourage an attitude toward wellness that is developed over a lifetime of healthy choices."

Linda Prentice, Director
Child Health Division
Texas Department of Health

teams have found that elementary teachers adapt best to the team environment. Many elementary teachers, however, do not have the additional subject courses required to teach in grades seven and eight. Administrators feel restricted in their ability to make teaching assignments based on teacher qualifications or from creating teacher-student teams that remain together throughout a student's career at the middle school.

A second common recommendation expressed to the task force was the need for training in the middle grade instructional setting. Even working within the teacher certification frameworks now in place in Texas, none of the state's institutions of higher education offer courses designed especially for teachers of young adolescents to supplement their elementary and secondary certificate degree programs. A list of "essential elements" for the education of prospective middle school teachers has been formulated by the National Middle School Association. In addition to content knowledge of at least one broad teaching field, this list includes course work in the nature and needs of early adolescents, middle level curriculum and instruction, and field experiences in middle schools.

The limitation on the number of semester credit hours of education courses that can be included in an undergraduate education degree serves as a constraint to colleges of education attempting to restructure teacher training programs. To meet the requirements set by the cap on education course credit hours and better prepare prospective middle school teachers, colleges of education can work with other academic departments to require education majors to earn semester credit hours in specific courses outside the college of education. For example, a course in adolescent psychology offered through the psychology department would be appropriate for middle school teachers. Conference courses, which are tailored to meet the needs of individual students, can also be used to prepare prospective teachers.

A third recommendation noted in testimony to the task force was the need for a middle grade teacher endorsement or certification. This is strongly supported by the professional literature. The Standing Committee on Professional Preparation and Certification of the National Middle School Association recommends an endorsement that covers grades five through nine. A middle school teaching endorsement that extends eligibility across the middle grades regardless of prior certification could increase flexibility in teacher assignment and better prepare teachers. The existence of a required endorsement would also serve as an inducement to colleges and universities to develop courses and programs appropriate for middle school professional development. Alternative routes to the middle school endorsement, including inservice training, can encompass the needs of teachers currently working at the middle grades, teachers who later choose to move to the middle grades from elementary or secondary schools, and out-of-state teachers moving to Texas.

Ongoing Teacher and Administrator Training

An enhanced educational experience for prospective middle grade teachers is not enough. In addition to any endorsement requirements, all middle school teachers in the classroom must be provided with ongoing inservice training in issues and strategies related to their work with young adolescents. Recent research on effective schools has found that the high levels of academic success found in these institutions depends upon continuous staff development efforts.

Administrators must also be provided with ongoing training in instructional leadership in middle school concepts and practices. The current required administrator training covers topics that are general to all administrative positions. Unless they have recent middle school experience, new middle school administrators may not be familiar with concepts of instructional organization and scheduling appropriate for middle schools. Faced with an unfamiliar environment, the new administrator may reverse restructuring begun by a predecessor.

While inservice training is offered by school districts, Regional Education Service Centers, the Texas Education Agency, colleges and universities, and professional organizations, the responsibility for procuring inservice training services has traditionally rested with each school district. The State Board of Education has recognized the need for a coordinated statewide staff development initiative and made this a priority recommendation for the Texas legislature. The state role in this initiative is to develop packages of training materials and provide training in the use of these materials and in the provision of technical assistance to trainers in Regional Education Service Centers, school districts, and other professional groups.

A statewide coordinated staff development program could integrate a wide variety of technological advances. The Texas Center for Educational Technology is exploring

Conference Prepares Teachers and Administrators for the 'Best Learning Time'

Each year Fort Worth ISD holds a one-day conference on educating the middle grade child called BLT: Best Learning Time. The conference, which is part of the district's inservice training program, provides training in middle grade developmental issues, instructional strategies, and programs for teachers, counselors, administrators and parents. The third BLT conference was held in 1990. Approximately 1000 educators and parents from Fort Worth and neighboring districts attended the 69 sessions presented at the conference.

The BLT conference is funded with local monies. The majority of the presenters come from Fort Worth ISD, local community agencies, and institutions of higher education. National speakers are invited for the keynote address, in-depth presentations, and parent and community workshops. Teachers and administrators from other Texas districts are also invited for presentations on topics of special interest.

The goals of the BLT conference include increasing understanding about the components of effective middle schools; providing educators with ongoing professional training pertinent to the needs of early adolescents; stressing the accountability of all middle grade educators and staff for implementation of middle grade education; enabling schools to more effectively carry out their short- and long-range plans for implementing and improving the total middle level education concept; and emphasizing the importance of guidance and counseling in the daily implementation of the curricular and extracurricular programs. ✦

educational uses of technologies originally developed for commercial purposes. Three identified research areas are instructional delivery systems; computer-based information exchange, educational telecommunications, and distance learning; and interactive computer-based instruction.

Implementing the academic programs and ongoing training needed by middle school teachers and administrators will require close cooperation between school districts, the Regional Education Service Centers, the Texas Education Agency, the State Board of Education, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the state's institutions of higher education. One model of this cooperation is based on a collaboration between middle schools and colleges of education. Classroom teachers and college faculty work together to improve instructional arrangements, develop curriculum, devise new teaching strategies, and test research hypotheses. There is a reciprocal arrangement among faculty on both sides of the partnership, with faculty from the college of education assigned to the middle school and classroom teachers working with education majors within the college.

School-University Collaboration Enhances Professional Development

One model of collaboration between institutions of higher education and public schools is the professional development school. The professional development school concept was formulated by the Holmes Group, a consortium of teacher educators in nearly 100 universities in the United States.

Teaching and learning for understanding for all students is an idea that is fundamental to the professional development school concept. This view of teaching requires changes in the ways in which teachers are educated, curriculum is structured, and classrooms are organized. It is a view that is sustained through thoughtful inquiry into teaching and learning and continuing education for teachers and administrators. It calls for the creation of a community of learning that works together to meet the needs of school children.

The Department of Education at Trinity University has organized a university-school-business cooperative effort called the Alliance for Better Education to help implement the professional development school concept in the San Antonio area. The university, North East and San Antonio ISD's, two local businesses, and the Brackenridge Foundation are partners in the Alliance for Better Education. Mark Twain Middle School in San Antonio ISD is one of the member schools.

Education students at Trinity University enroll in a five-year teacher preparation program. Education students spend their fifth year at the graduate level working as interns at one of the alliance schools in either North East or San Antonio ISD. The teachers at the schools act as mentors for the interns. Selected teachers serve as adjunct professors in Trinity's education department. In addition, Trinity faculty work on a continuing basis with teachers from the alliance schools to identify, prioritize, and implement school improvement projects. In the implementation of these projects, teachers at the participating schools receive continuing education from Trinity University faculty. At Mark Twain Middle School these school improvement projects have addressed the needs of students at risk of school failure, the development of academic teams, and curriculum efforts in writing and mathematics.

At Texas A&M University the professional development school concept involves a task force made up of university faculty from the areas of education, psychology, health, and architecture, and administrators from the Bryan, Conroe, and Southwest ISD's working to develop a model middle school. The task force has examined curriculum, instruction, programs, and school configuration to design a developmentally appropriate middle school. The school will be a facility where education students at Texas A&M can receive classroom experience. Ongoing teacher training will be available from faculty at the university. Teachers at the school will collaborate with Texas A&M University faculty on research projects and school improvement initiatives. ✦

Texas Strategies for Goal 3: *Personnel*

For the Legislature:

3.1 Increase the number of paid noninstructional inservice training days and planning days for teachers and administrators.

3.2 Provide statutory authority and funding for a statewide staff development program covering current needs and ongoing training. This training would include updating training models based on evaluation, research, emerging technology, and effective practices. Funds would be used for the development, delivery, monitoring, and evaluation of training in areas designated by the State Board of Education.

For the State Board of Education:

3.3 With the Commission on Standards for the Teaching Profession, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, institutions of higher education, and middle school professionals, develop standards for middle school specialization, endorsement, or certification for teachers and administrators. Develop corresponding guidelines for alternative endorsement through staff development activities such as inservice training. Integrate changes into rules relating to teacher education, teacher certification, and assignment of personnel during the spring 1993 sunset review of these chapters, to become effective in the 1994-95 school year.

For Institutions of Higher Education:

3.4 Identify existing courses and develop new courses to meet the preparation and professional development needs of middle school teachers and administrators. Specialized preparation should address the content areas of the curriculum, instructional strategies which emphasize active learning, cultural literacy, and the developmental characteristics of young adolescence. Collaborate with Regional Education Service Centers and school districts in identifying learning needs of middle school teachers and administrators.

For Regional Education Service Centers:

3.5 Explore opportunities for collaborative efforts with school districts and colleges of education within the region to develop training programs that coordinate academic course work and lifelong learning needs of teachers and administrators. This collaboration can include sharing school and college faculties, co-development of curriculum, and cooperative research activities.

3.6 Provide middle school staff development in such areas as academic teaming, flexible grouping strategies in heterogeneous classrooms, techniques for reteaching in heterogeneously grouped classrooms, developmentally appropriate instructional practices, identifying and addressing different learning styles, cultural diversity, and critical thinking for all students.

For School Districts and Campuses:

3.7 Provide staff development opportunities for teachers specific to middle grade education.

3.8 Review leadership and management training needs and requirements annually.

3.9 Request waivers for middle schools from rules regarding assignment criteria, permit requirements, and parent notification for teachers that have a valid Texas teaching certificate but are teaching in areas outside their areas of certification. ✦

Goal 4: *Organization and Management*

There is a consensus among educators at all levels that mandated change does not work. The diversity of schools and districts that exists in Texas makes it particularly difficult for policymakers to design changes that are appropriate across the state. With the delegation of decision making to the district and campus levels, accompanied by a strengthening of the performance-based accreditation process, the legislature has taken a step away from state regulation of processes toward developing standards for educational outcomes. However, the legislature also holds the purse strings for over 40 percent of school district revenues. The financial management and audit control responsibilities related to this funding authority sometimes compete with the efforts to provide greater flexibility to schools and districts in providing services to students. The focus of the task force recommendations to the legislature is to place a priority on providing greater flexibility and incentives to school districts through funding mechanisms.

The Texas State Board of Education plays a leadership role through development of the *Long-Range Plan* and a policy implementation role through the rule-making process. Some of the most far-reaching strategies recommended by the task force originate with the board. The focus of these strategies for the board is leadership in formulation of goals, objectives, and rules that provide districts with direction and flexibility in developing quality education programs appropriate to the restructured middle school.

The role of the Texas Education Agency is to provide statewide coordination and leadership assistance to Regional Education Service Centers and school districts. The agency strategies in the plan call for centralized coordination of

- **Establish building governance committees.**
- **Designate leaders for the teaching process.**
- **Give teachers greater influence in the classroom.**
- **Establish schools as health-promoting environments.**

— *Turning Points*
RECOMMENDATIONS

"Adopting the strategies in this report requires a commitment from district administrators, principals, teachers, and counselors."

Armando Bustamante
Principal, Socorro Middle School, Socorro I S D

Program Promotes Wellness For Students and Faculty

Canyon Vista Middle School in Round Rock ISD, one of the schools recognized in the 1991 U.S. Department of Education National School Recognition Program, has a wellness program for students, parents and faculty. Canyon Vista Middle School has nearly 750 students enrolled in grades six through eight. The objective of the Wellness Program is to promote healthy lifestyle choices. The program is coordinated by the school nurse.

The program, first established in 1988, has three components. A walking and jogging program has been implemented with 100-, 250-, and 500-mile clubs. In the spring of 1991, 109 students and 35 faculty members belonged to the 100-mile club, 40 of these members have qualified for the 250-mile club, and one student and one teacher have qualified for the 500-mile club. In addition to walking outdoors, teachers and school staff have access to a trail that has been marked off within the school building.

The second part of the Wellness Program is a forum called Advisory Advantage at which students can hear speakers on a variety of health, fitness, and safety topics. The forum is scheduled once each month during advisory period. It is coordinated by the school nurse. Topics of discussion include skateboard safety, skin wellness, allergies, CPR, and cults. Guest speakers have included an emergency room physician and an orthopedic surgeon. Attendance at Advisory Advantage discussions is optional. Passes are required, however, due to limited seating.

The third component of the program is a series of Family Fitness Fairs scheduled once each year. The fairs are open to parents and community members. They are supported by the P.T.A., the community school, and local businesses. In 1990, 500 people attended the fair. Round Rock Independent School District employees are able to pre-pay and schedule screening and testing services. Activities include games, activities, and health information and screening services.♦

statewide efforts and emphasize guidance and assistance to districts and schools in initiating restructuring rather than monitoring compliance with mandated changes. The agency can also serve as a centralized source of information about resources available to middle schools and model programs.

While the Regional Education Service Centers serve no regulatory or supervisory role, they are central to the provision of technical assistance and staff development services to school districts and teachers. The centers also provide districts within their region with programs and services ranging from instructional media to curriculum development and assistance to fiscal control and accounting services to data processing services. The task force strategies for the Regional Education Service Centers are consistent with this service dissemination role and also emphasize their unique position to serve a coordination and networking function for districts in the region.

Texas school districts are taking the first steps in implementing a statewide district-level decision making process that provides professional staff with the opportunity to participate in establishing and reviewing the district's educational goals, objectives, and major district-wide classroom instruction programs. Local school boards are required to meet with representative professional staff, including classroom teachers. Principals are also required to establish annual campus-level performance objectives through a collaborative process involving campus administrators, professional staff, parents, and community residents. The perform-

“The school must provide a safe environment as well as a community for learning.”

Yolanda Gonzalez, Principal
Cunningham Middle School, Corpus Christi I S D

ance objectives must be included in the campus improvement plan and the appraisal of the principal. The campus improvement plan also ties in to the campus performance indicators that are being developed as part of the academic excellence indicators system. The task force strategies for school district and campus administrators focus on a re-evaluation of local priorities, exploration of alternatives, acquisition of middle school expertise, and implementation of reforms through the campus planning process.

The task force advocates a teaching environment that is structured around the characteristics and needs of middle grade students. Within this environment, teachers foster critical thinking skills, facilitate learning, and focus on student mastery rather than class length. Teachers also collaborate with their peers, campus administrators, and other professional staff. Teaching teams can act as mentoring, planning, and support groups for teachers at the middle grades. Team members provide support for incoming teachers and help substitute teachers work more effectively. Team leaders can provide a voice in campus- and district-level decision making processes.

A concern heard throughout the state is the need for school health services to focus on prevention, education, and coordination of services within the school and community. Research has shown that health-related knowledge and opinions of young people can be changed through instruction, but health-related behavior can only be changed by promoting a healthy environment and providing healthy role models and through multiple and sustained interventions. Schools as institutions must model and promote the behaviors desired as student outcomes of the education process. Some of the elements of a coordinated preventative health program are nutrition; exercise; drug, alcohol, and tobacco effect awareness; and smoke-free environments for both students and staff.

Teachers Mentoring New Teachers

Visions is a teacher mentor program at Spring Woods Junior High School in Spring Branch ISD. Nearly 1000 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students are enrolled at Spring Woods Junior High. The program matches veteran Spring Woods teachers with teachers that have less than two years experience or teachers that are new to the school. The program is coordinated by an assistant principal and a steering committee of veteran teachers and past Vision members.

Meetings between the new teachers and their mentors are held twice a month before school starts. These are informal meetings, the goal of which is to introduce new teachers into the culture of the school and establish peer relationships and support between the new and veteran teachers. In addition to mentoring, there is a staff development component for the new teachers in the program. Topics for staff development come from on-going needs assessments. Speakers include invited guests, school administration, and past Vision members. ✦

“Training for middle school administrators should address the critical academic, social, and psychological needs of young adolescents, with a focus on leadership development and collaborative decision making.”

Johnny Veselka, Executive Director
Texas Assn of School Administrators

Burleson ISD Encourages Shared Leadership

The Shared Leadership Program at Burleson, Pauline G. Hughes Junior High School in Burleson ISD allows teachers, parents, and students to join the administrative staff in making decisions about the school. According to principal W. L. Sanders, the program seeks to decentralize school governance; share power with teachers, parents, and students; and establish a school culture based upon high academic and behavioral expectations for all. Burleson, P. G. Hughes Junior High School, which was recognized for academic gains by the Governor's Committee for Academic Excellence in 1990, has an enrollment of 1200 seventh, eighth, and ninth grade students. The Shared Leadership Program has been in place for five years.

Central to the program is the school leadership team, established by a constitution and composed of the principal and eleven department heads. The principal is a nonvoting member of the team. The function of the leadership team is to review and modify proposed school policies. Hughes administrative staff prepare the policy. The leadership team refers the policy proposal, as appropriate, to ad hoc task forces made up of teachers, parents and students. The task forces submit their recommendations concerning proposed policy to the leadership team for review and approval.

The leadership team receives training in school governance issues and visits shared leadership campuses. Small stipends are budgeted to compensate members of the leadership team. Substitutes are hired while the team is trained. This method of policymaking not only shares leadership; it shares ownership in school policies, programs, and routines. The faculty at Burleson, Hughes Junior High School now serve as trainers for teachers and administrators from other campuses exploring teacher, parent, and student empowerment. ✦

Texas Strategies for Goal 4: *Organization and Management*

For the State Board of Education:

4.1 Encourage campus administrators to base campus improvement plans on a needs assessment that incorporates task force recommendations with effective schools correlates.

4.2 Annually review all requests for waivers from middle schools to determine which rules are being identified as impeding student achievement and administrative efficiency. Consider changing rules to encourage implementation of effective programs and practices statewide in areas where waivers have been requested to strengthen and improve instruction that incorporate recommendations from this report.

For the Texas Education Agency:

4.3 Identify a middle school coordinator to serve as a contact for middle schools, coordinate programs and services throughout the agency, work with interagency coordination efforts concerned with middle school issues, identify private and public funding sources for research and programs focussing on the middle grades, and maintain the data base of notable middle school programs and middle school electronic bulletin board. Since middle school concerns cut across all departments of the Texas Education Agency, locate the position with visibility at the deputy commissioner level in an area with broad responsibilities to middle schools.

For Regional Education Service Centers:

4.4 Develop expertise in the concepts related to restructuring middle schools to provide leadership to districts undertaking this process.

For School Districts and Campuses:

4.5 Integrate goals and objectives for creating a healthy campus environment as a component of the campus improvement plan. Include staff and students in the planning of this component. Encourage activities such as health promotion for staff and schoolwide youth service projects for students.

For Teachers:

4.6 Through the campus planning process and classroom preparation, develop objectives for fully implementing all of the goals for restructuring the instructional setting of middle schools to meet the needs of all students. ✦

Goal 5: *Finance*

Many of the most important changes recommended by the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education are unique in that they do not require the addition of costly programs to what schools are already doing. They recommend that schools do things in different ways and that agencies providing services to young adolescents coordinate those services.

There are some increased costs associated with operating the restructured middle school compared to the traditional junior high school, however. The process of restructuring, furthermore, requires an initial investment and a strong commitment to a redirection of some existing funds. Schools attempting to make changes and those helping them both incur costs. For example, curriculum guides may need major revision when the instructional setting is reorganized into interdisciplinary teaching teams. One school paid teachers to do this over the summer. In another school, the development of new curriculum guides was done in collaboration with faculty from higher education. School staff had to be freed from other duties to participate in the collaboration.

A comparatively small amount of money can effect change. The Texas Legislature funds a limited number of innovative programs serving a wide range of student populations with a variety of programs and services. The purpose of these programs is to implement, test, and disseminate research-based effective school programs. Schools seeking to serve as innovative program sites are competitively selected. Reports from schools that have received funding for pilot programs are positive. Schools serving as demonstration sites, however, whether through the implementation of state-funded innovative programs or by successfully restructuring through local initiative, must cope with increased demands on facilities and staff.

"If you want parents and legislators to support education reform, you must develop accountability measures that can be understood by non-educators."

Sen. Carl Parker, Member
Legislative Education Board

“These programs are idealistic for most small school districts unless we pursue the cooperation and funding to allow them to participate.”

Garland Davis, Executive Director
Texas Assn of Community Schools

Funding Special Programs in the Restructured Middle School

The method by which the state allocates funds can serve as either an incentive or disincentive to schools in achieving program goals. Ideally, all funding mechanisms support state program goals. Situations in which a mismatch exists are generally those where program goals are competing with other goals and responsibilities. State-level policymakers have financial management and audit responsibilities. The funding mechanisms that best meet these responsibilities are those in which there is a high degree of accountability and control. Such funding mechanisms do not necessarily provide the greatest flexibility to schools or the greatest incentive toward achieving program goals. A need heard as often as the request for more money is the need for more flexibility in spending existing funds. Substantial redirection of special program funds to services that are integrated into the regular program can be done under current laws and rules. However, the supplemental expenditure requirements of state special program funds can serve as a barrier to schools seeking to restructure the traditional instructional setting. The challenge of the use of special program funds is to provide flexibility without diminishing their original intent, which is to target special services to students with special needs.

Supplemental expenditure requirements of federal special program funds, such as Elementary and Secondary Education Act Chapter 1 funds, can also be impediments to restructuring. Although recent reauthorizations of the act have introduced greater flexibility in the use of funds, many districts have not taken full advantage of these changes. This is probably due in part to the fact that past practices continue to meet new audit requirements and in part to the planning required to implement schoolwide programs that are more integrated into a school's regular education program.

Changes in state law designed to provide districts with greater local control are not always supported by changes in corresponding funding formulas. Schools feel that they are getting a mixed message from the legislature. For example, recent legislation and corresponding State Board of Education rules removed time-on-task constraints to flexible scheduling. However, the funding definitions for average daily attendance and eligible transportation routes were not updated. Consequently, all costs associated with an expanded school day, expanded school week, or expanded school year must be absorbed locally. Districts that most need these programs are often least able to support them with local funds.

Restructuring will be most difficult for education programs that are under-funded. These programs will continue to suffer the consequences of inadequate funding after restructuring. The need for adequate and equitable funding among school districts has received much attention in Texas and the nation. The increased initial cost to the taxpayer of adequately funding education programs ultimately saves from three to six times the original investment in improved student performance, increased school holding power, and fewer referrals to prevention and intervention services. Differences also exist in funding among school campuses. In recent years the attention of policymakers has focused on the early elementary grades and the high school grades. Education priorities are often reflected in local budgeting decisions. In 1989-90, expenditures per pupil in middle schools averaged almost $600 less than in high schools. The *Long-Range Plan* encourages districts and campuses to place priority on efficient use of funds for instructional quality and student progress.

Texas Strategies For Goal 5: *Finance*

For the Legislature:

5.1 Provide adequate funding for public education through the state equalized funding system.

5.2 Increase funding for innovative programs. Give priority to start-up funding of programs that can continue without additional funding after the initial grant. Recognize the need for longer implementation periods, up to five years, for some programs. Continue funding of successful programs to defray costs to schools and districts of serving as demonstration sites.

5.3 Restructure funding mechanisms to give all school districts a better opportunity to take advantage of the move toward more flexibility in local decisions. Revise the definitions of average daily attendance and eligible transportation routes for funding purposes to accommodate extended school day, extended school week, and extended school year programs.

For the State Board of Education:

5.4 Define the supplemental expenditure requirements for state special program allotments as broadly as possible and encourage districts to reduce tracking by emphasizing expenditure for staff development programs to train all teachers in instructional strategies/programs that are effective for use with special populations in the regular classroom.

For the Texas Education Agency:

5.5 Assist districts in planning school-wide programs and programs that are integrated into the regular classroom for funding under Chapter 1 of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

For School Districts and Campuses:

5.6 Assure adequate funding for middle schools in the district operating budget by allocating funds based on needs that are met through such activities as advisory periods and a second planning period for core teachers on an academic team. ✦

Goal 6: *Parent Responsibility*

The middle schools advocated by the Task Force on Middle School Education are not isolated. Like the staffs within them, they work as part of a team. They are connected to the families of their students and to the organizations and institutions of their communities. They draw upon the resources available to them in the homes and communities they serve and share resources and information to achieve academic goals and promote adolescent development.

Complications that must be overcome in creating this team are the hesitancy of students to involve their parents in school activities and the indifference of some parents. Elements of child development and family dynamics that foster parent involvement in the elementary grades change dramatically with emerging adolescence. Young adolescents are seeking independence from their parents, who in turn are more likely to be working as their children grow older. Issues associated with declining parent involvement can be compounded by the size and school attendance zones of many middle schools. Elementary schools often serve neighborhoods while middle schools serve parts of town.

Parents and educators who wish to see reforms in middle grade education must start at the level of the local school. There must be cooperation and collaboration in developing models of education based on the priorities of both parents and educators. These models must combine traditional wisdom with an understanding of the pressures and problems created by changing familial and social conditions. The perceptions of parents that they are unwanted and those of teachers and principals that parents are uninterested need to be faced and resolved. Schools must value, and communities must encourage, parent involvement. Parents must recognize that the ultimate

- **Offer families opportunities to support the learning process at home and at school.**
- **Keep parents informed.**
- **Offer parents meaningful roles in school governance.**

— Turning Points
RECOMMENDATIONS

"If you offer parents the opportunity for meaningful involvement in the school, they will respond."

Charles Pankey, Director
Interagency Relations
Texas Department of
Human Services

Harlandale Program Encourages Parents To Be School Supporters

The Parents as School Supporters (PASS) program at Harlandale Middle School in Harlandale ISD seeks to involve parents in the education of their children by training them as home teachers and emphasizing parent-child activities that can ease the transition into the middle grades. The PASS program is directed by Harlandale ISD's compensatory education department and serves 440 fifth through seventh grade students. It was awarded a 1990/91 Family/School Partnership grant from the U.S. Department of Education Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching.

PASS program activities are developed within six priority areas. The first three priority areas center on training the parents as home teachers. Activities in priority one provide reading and mathematics instructional materials and training for use by parents as teachers at home. This is particularly important for parents whose educational level may not be above that of their children. Under priority two, parents will be trained in the utilization of computers to help assist their children. Activities in priority three are designed to teach parents new methods of communicating with children and school personnel and include workshops that model effective communication techniques.

Activities under priority areas four, five, and six center around parent and family counseling sessions that have as a goal making the home environment more conducive to learning as a goal. Under priority four, parents attend counseling sessions and discussions on stages of child development. Activities in priority five help parents reinforce their children's learning with everyday experiences. Priority six involves counseling that focuses on strengthening parent-child relationships during the transition from elementary to middle and on through to high school. ✦

form of parental involvement is personal involvement of parents in the education of their own children.

The *Long-Range Plan* states that parents will be full partners in the education of their children. This partnership is a necessary support to the school-based community of learning advocated by the Task Force on Middle School Education. A broad spectrum of involvement has been identified for parents in the schools, ranging from keeping parents informed about the educational progress of their children through providing components of parent education and offering families opportunities to support learning at home to participating in school activities and governance. In the middle school, this range of parent involvement activities can be used to create a bridge between the relationships that were begun in the elementary years and a future that allows for each child's full educational, social, and emotional development.

Middle schools, like other grade levels, have an ongoing need for parent volunteers in a variety of roles on campus. To be effective, parent involvement programs must address the needs and activities of the families in the communities surrounding each middle school campus and adapt to the conditions that each child brings to school. This becomes more difficult as the communities served by middle schools become increasingly diverse.

Methods for adapting to this diversity are already in place. Many Texas middle schools personalize family contacts with school, assigning an adult advisor or

"In every class period the teacher writes something on the board that the students are required to copy into their assignment calendars. If there is no homework assignment, it may be a theme for that day's lesson. Parents know about this rule and are encouraged to check the assignment calendar and discuss the entries with their children."

Nick Pike, Principal
Desert View Middle School
Ysleta I S D

teaching team member to each student's family and involving parents in the transition of students into and out of the middle grades. In many Texas middle schools family-school contacts are enhanced by scheduling parent meetings during the teaching team's common planning period. Parents can meet with all of the core curriculum teachers at once and receive a more holistic view of their child's educational progress.

Many school districts have implemented programs for special populations, such as gifted and talented and at-risk students, that include detailed parent involvement components. These programs promote a degree of accountability for parents, teachers, and students that can lead to positive effects with the most challenging segments of a district's population. The planning and accountability that help make these program components successful need not be restricted to special populations. These parent involvement components may be transportable and adaptable to a broad range of families whose children attend middle school.

Many middle schools must develop prevention programs that are designed to help families ensure access to basic skills, resources, safety, and health. Once outside the scope of traditional school-family relations, these programs focus on adult literacy and provide education related to effective parenting, helping families protect their children from the risks of contemporary society, and orientation to community and social services. These programs are vital to both state and national goals of greater educational achievement for a broader segment of the population, dropout prevention, and work force readiness.

Many of the parents who expressed opinions to the task force felt that they could not have an impact on decisions being made about the education of their

Programs That Encourage Involvement Among Mobile Families

Olle Middle School in Alief ISD was recognized as an exemplary school by the U.S. Department of Education in 1991. The school has an enrollment of 1200 students in grades six through eight. The student population is highly mobile, with a turnover rate of nearly 40 percent per year. Principal Linda Sheehan has implemented two programs that help the school, the students and their families cope with this change.

The Orientation Advisory program was first implemented in the 1989-90 school year. The program was designed by Ms. Sheehan in consultation with the school registrar, assistant principals, teachers, and secretaries. The goal of the program is to reduce the apprehension and isolation experienced by new students at Olle Middle School. Through the advisory period, the program seeks to facilitate the transition of new students into the rules and routines at the school and provide a daily opportunity for new students to ask questions and receive individualized attention in a setting where their peers are all newcomers.

At the beginning of the school year all new students are placed in the Orientation Advisory period for two weeks prior to being assigned to their permanent advisory period on an academic team. An orientation advisor provides the new student with a student handbook, report card procedures, a copy of academic team rules and supply lists, a school map, and physical education class rules and regulations. All students complete a survey and provide personal data that forms the basis of the student's advisory file. All new students take a mathematics placement examination prior to leaving the Orientation Advisory program.

During the first year of operation, the program was evaluated by the team that designed it. Ongoing evaluation of the Orientation Advisory program is conducted by the school's Advisory Committee. Evaluation results indicate that new students appear to be more cognizant of school rules and able to better handle the transition to Olle Middle School.

CAPERS, Counselors and Parents Engaging in Responsible Strategies, is a program at Olle Middle School that promotes parent involvement through meetings between school administrators and groups of parents at apartment complexes within the Olle attendance zone. The meetings occur in the fall of each year. The program has been in place since 1987 and includes four administrators and three counselors.

The school staff initiates contact with local apartment managers to schedule meetings. Notices of the meeting are posted at each apartment complex and given to the students to take home. The students are informed of the meeting in their advisory classes.

The purpose of these meetings is to establish patterns of communication between the school and parents, inform the parents of school routines and goals, provide them with specific orientation information and solicit their help in the overall process of educating their children. As a follow-up to the meeting, parents are encouraged to contact an Olle administrator or counselor with their particular concerns.

The CAPERS program's effectiveness is measured by an increase in attendance by parents at other school functions. ✦

children. Research supporting this view has found that levels of parent involvement increase when parents feel that they have access to meaningful roles of school governance. One study found that parents perceived that important decisions about school governance and the education of their children were removed from consideration by local campuses and made by district superintendents and the local school board. They expressed a preference for shifting power from a district's central administrative office to their local campus. According to the study, teachers and principals shared this perception and preference for local decision making. In calling for greater involvement, these parents did not see their roles in governing councils and parent organizations as exceeding the authority of the educators on their local campus. Parent involvement in school governance, which is one facet of the school-family partnership, is provided for in recent state legislation concerning campus-based management.

Texas Strategies for Goal 6: *Parent Responsibility*

For the Texas Education Agency:

6.1 Develop guidelines for strategies of effective parent involvement in the development of campus performance indicators.

For Regional Education Service Centers:

6.2 Sponsor annual regional parent involvement conferences for parents and school district personnel that feature experts in the field and highlight exemplary parent involvement programs.

For School Districts and Campuses:

6.3 Explore innovative ways of involving parents in the education of their children, such as through parent volunteer and education centers.

6.4 Provide parent training in the skills needed to operate as a member of a campus management team. ✦

Goal 7: *Community and Business Partnerships*

The middle schools envisioned by the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education are integral parts of their surrounding communities. From this perspective, schools are able to draw upon the resources of local community agencies and businesses as they share their own resources, facilities, and information to achieve academic goals and promote adolescent development. This view of community and business involvement in middle schools encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, many of which are outside traditional definitions of school-community partnerships.

Ensure Access to Social and Health Services

Crucial to the recommendations of the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education is the integration of education with social and health services. These services can include health clinics and referrals to medical practitioners, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, counseling, social work, child and family protection, and referrals to state human services programs. An analysis of state services to juveniles in Texas found gaps in the state's social service network for children under the age of 18. Service delivery to this age group is neither sufficiently coordinated nor managed. The resulting variance in services across the state and the failure of the many independently operating arms of state social service agencies to provide adequate and timely identification, assessment, and treatment for children in need costs Texas approximately $17 billion annually. This cost includes such elements as lost income, lost tax revenue, welfare assistance, retraining programs, and crime and incarceration costs. Twenty-four percent of the children who dropped out of school during the 1989-90 school year

- **Ensure student access to health and social services.**
- **Support the middle grade education program.**
- **Augment resources for teachers and students.**
- **Expand career guidance.**
- **Provide opportunities for youth service.**

— *Turning Points* RECOMMENDATIONS

“To educate every child to his or her maximum potential, we must bring together the expertise and resources of the school, the community and the home.”

Maria Hernandez Ferrier
Director, Guidance and Special Programs
Southwest I S D

Hogg Foundation Fosters Community Support With Schools of the Future

Schools of the Future is a program funded by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Long-term collaboration between public school systems, community health and social service agencies, teachers, and parents is the goal of the program. There are four middle schools serving as Schools of the Future program sites in the Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio ISD's.

The schools were chosen on the basis of need, potential for improvement, strength of the principal as instructional leader, and their ability to provide accurate program data. Each school is given $50,000 a year for the five-year program period. A project coordinator oversees the implementation of the program at each site and provides the Hogg Foundation with evaluation data. Evaluation is critical to the program's success: each school will serve as a model for future implementation in other schools around the state.

The program seeks to use the school as a locus for the delivery of an integrated array of health and human services. Project coordinators are charged with devising strategies that draw upon the strengths of their schools — daily contact with and observation of students, contact with families, and the campus as a focal point in the community — to meet the health and emotional needs of their students and families. The project coordinators are establishing networks of social and community services. These networks facilitate the work of the school counselors in student referral, give the service provider a contact for working with the school, and focus on preventive services for the students and their families. Underlying the Schools of the Future program is a belief that social problems rarely exist in isolation. They are multifaceted and they impact academic achievement.

The program is developing according to the conditions of the communities that surround the four schools. All of the project coordinators, however, have taken similar steps in implementing their programs. These include focusing on improving school climate so that the school is more conducive to education, personal enhancement, and parent involvement; developing parent involvement and education programs and participation in school governance; and establishing a cluster of local community services and activities. ✦

were from low-income homes. Even when they stay in school, children cannot learn to their full potential when they are hungry, hurting, or ill. Middle schools must form new school-community partnerships to coordinate health and social services for their students. While it is not the middle school teacher's or administrator's role to serve as a doctor or social worker, they must become familiar with health and social service providers in their community.

Schools can make an effort to ensure student access to health and social services by initiating a referral process for their students to needed social service providers. Health services and services from community, city, and county agencies can be either school-based, in which the service is physically located on school property, or school-linked, in which referrals are made to programs and services that are either on the school grounds or at sites near the campus.

Community Education in the Middle School

Community education provides a vehicle for coordinating services to support the middle grade education program. Community educators, working within the campus- and district-level planning processes and with community, city, and county agencies and local businesses, can help coordinate resources to meet the needs of middle grade students and their families. Programs growing out of this coordination, such as before- and after-school programs, community service projects, and school-business partnerships, provide academic support and enrichment, enhance decision-

making and communication skills, and provide opportunities for leadership development.

Middle School-Community Partnerships

Active support from community, city, and county institutions and local businesses is crucial to middle schools. In a recent survey, however, large corporations in Texas gave schools in the state a grade of C minus. If middle schools and the business sector are to become partners, they clearly must work toward a new level of understanding. Both parties must articulate program goals, objectives, and measures of accountability. Campus planning committees, composed of the principal, school professional staff, parents, and community residents, may provide one path toward this articulation. Campus planning committees are charged with establishing annual campus performance objectives.

Businesses have traditionally provided schools with donations of money and equipment. Middle school-community partnerships can expand that valuable support to include more active types of involvement, with com-

"The business community has a big stake in education and a lot of clout when it comes to effecting educational change."

Christie Bourgeois
Coordinator
Education Policy
Office of the Governor

School-Based After-School Programs For Middle School Students

The Kids Involvement Network, or KIN, is an after-school program for children in the middle grades that operates on two campuses in North East (San Antonio) ISD. Eighty-three students in grades six through eight are served by the program, which is located at Wood and Ed White middle schools. The program is coordinated by the North East ISD Community Education Department. At Wood Middle School it is funded by tuition fees that are based on a sliding scale that has a ceiling of $30 per week and support from local businesses. At White Middle School the KIN program is funded by a grant from the Texas Education Agency.

The KIN program provides after-school academic opportunities and enrichment activities for middle grade students from the time that school is dismissed to 6:00 p.m. At Ed White Middle School the program also operates during school holidays and over the summer. The activities include study and test-taking skills, computer-assisted instruction, and leadership development as well as sports, arts and crafts, drama, nutrition, nature activities, and field trips. ✦

"Students will go to great inconvenience to attend a school at which they feel they belong."

Maria Luisa Garza, Executive Director
Gulf Coast Council of La Raza

munity services, personnel, and programs brought into the school to enrich the course content of the middle grades. Examples of this more active involvement include tutoring, mentoring, adopt-a-school programs, loaning business personnel to school functions, providing access to staff development and professional training programs, and developing career awareness in middle school students. Texas corporations indicate that they are willing to assume these more active roles in the schools. To make the most of this new partnership, however, schools must become aware of models of greater community and business involvement and coordinate campus-based business efforts.

One powerful role that the business community can play in middle schools is to tie their involvement in a school's academic goals and objectives to career exploration for students. The purpose of career exploration in these relatively early grades is to introduce students to the wide options that exist in the work place and how they are associated with academic goals, without limiting them to a particular academic program or readying them for particular career tracks. Career exploration and guidance at the middle grades should encourage academic achievement and be student centered, proceeding from the values and expectations that the students have for themselves and addressing the need for a broad range of knowledge and skills in the work place.

As partners, middle schools can be expected to return service to their community. One element of this responsibility is the development of youth service opportunities for middle school students. All middle grade students should be provided with the opportunity to participate in clubs and extracurricular activities that take on long-term community service projects involving a number of students throughout the year.

Texas Strategies for Goal 7: *Community and Business Partnerships*

For the Legislature:

7.1 Pass legislation requiring all agencies providing services for young adolescents, including public education, to collaborate in developing a state plan for coordinating services. The plan should provide direction to the member agencies and address the need to (1) identify responsibility for services; (2) coordinate efforts at the state level, including establishing common eligibility criteria for services that integrate federal program eligibility criteria; and (3) coordinate management information systems to share information and develop the social services data bank into a true case management system. Require each member agency to adopt goals and objectives for implementation of the plan to coordinate services at the state and local levels.

For State and Community Agencies:

7.2 Coordinate services and resources to best respond to local community needs.

For the Texas Education Agency and Regional Education Service Centers:

7.3 Work with business, interagency, and community groups to develop and disseminate models of effective community involvement in each region. These models can include volunteer efforts, material support, and such activities as career and/or community awareness.

7.4 Extend the Texas School Improvement Initiative program to provide business and community leaders and parents with knowledge and training related to effective schools research and the school accreditation process so that they can participate on school accreditation teams.

For School Districts and Campuses:

7.5 Include coordination of services to students as a component of the district dropout reduction plan. Explore the use of federal and/or state special program revenues to fund this function with a staff position that coordinates services, such as a district or campus at-risk coordinator.

7.6 Explore opportunities for cooperative educational and enrichment programs, including expanded school day and expanded school year opportunities such as scouting and latchkey programs, with community service organizations and agencies, local businesses, and colleges of education. Collaborate with social service and health agencies and community organizations to develop guidelines that foster sharing of services and facilities by agencies in such areas as the use of school buildings, sharing transportation services, and providing school-based day care. ✦

Goal 8: *Research, Development and Evaluation*

The implementation process that is integral to reforming middle grade education as recommended by the Texas Task Force on Middle School Education involves both a vision of the future and a critical examination of the present. It pairs the achievement of long-term goals with an ongoing assessment of students and staff. It is important that the criteria used to set goals and assess school performance be appropriate to the needs and conditions of middle schools and that the results of any assessment be made available to middle school teachers and administrators on a timely basis. It is equally important to recognize those Texas middle schools that exemplify task force recommendations and to undertake a coordinated effort to make their successes more widespread.

There is a great interest in nontraditional methods of student assessment and a great aversion to campus performance indicators based solely on test scores. Some Texas school districts are exploring alternative types of assessment, such as student portfolios, dialogue journals, peer editing and evaluation tests, and teacher-student interviews that go beyond traditional pencil and paper instruments. The Texas Center for Educational Technology has also identified the assessment of student learning and cognition as an area of educational research in which computer-based methods for diagnosing students' learning and cognitive processes may provide an alternative.

Recent state legislation mandates the comparison between middle schools using such performance indicators as criterion- and norm-based test scores. The task force advocates a broad range of campus performance indicators that measure progress over time and are indicative of the

•Teach students to learn, as well as test, successfully.

— Turning Points
RECOMMENDATIONS

" Student assessment that enhances student learning covers a range of learning styles and provides teachers and administrators with timely feedback. "

Lonnie Wagstaff
Education Professor
University of Texas at Austin

Portfolios Provide Alternative Methods of Student Evaluation

Educators are turning to alternative assessment instruments to measure student academic progress. Portfolios provide teachers, students, and administrators with a broad, long-term record of student performance across a range of subjects. Portfolios consists of significant student work collected over the course of a semester or from one year to the next. The work can include a range of materials in a variety of formats: writing samples, including drafts and final copies; work in mathematics; photographs or video and audio tapes of science and art projects; and standardized test scores. Portfolios can also be used to document a student's extra- and co-curricular work and community-related activities.

Teachers use portfolios not only to assess one best effort, but to evaluate student progress over time and collaborate with students and other members of the teaching team in the review, critique, and selection of student work. Portfolio assessment can increase student involvement in the evaluation process. The student can choose his or her own best efforts which the teacher can choose to incorporate with other materials selected by faculty members over a period of time.

Portfolios are being used at Huntsville Junior High School in Huntsville ISD as part of a cooperative learning program funded through a Chapter 2 grant and local monies.

There is no specific formula for producing a student portfolio. They can be designed around local curriculum, instructional methods, and activities, reflecting the choices of the faculty of a particular school, at a grade level, or on an academic team. ✦

middle school environment. These middle school indicators should employ a number of instruments that are valid across a range of demographic and socioeconomic conditions. It is important to select criteria that do not directly or indirectly encourage tracking students by academic ability. The indicators could include such measures as test scores; knowledge of the core curriculum and exploratory electives; problem solving abilities, including the ability to understand basic principles, assimilate new information, and use information to make logical generalizations; oral and written communication skills; student expulsions, retention, and the number of dropouts; level of parental involvement; a school health indicator; self-esteem, self-direction, and personal responsibility; discipline referrals; cooperative skills and interpersonal relations; knowledge of other cultures; measures of school climate; and level of implementation of concepts and practices appropriate to the middle grades. These measures could incorporate pre- and post-test results.

Research and evaluation of effective middle school programs must be communicated across the state. Currently, there is no coordinated effort to help districts identify and evaluate effective middle school programs. Program information from notable middle schools exists in several divisions throughout the Texas Education Agency. There is no effort now underway to standardize the format of this information. It is tied to particular programs or special populations served rather than to age range or grade level.

There are nationally recognized middle schools in Texas. These schools exist alongside others that have little familiarity with middle school concepts and practices. The lack of statewide access to middle school research and information promotes this disparity. One result is that those schools that are identified by various practitioners as exemplary can be overburdened with requests for tours and information about their programs. Another is resistance and misunderstanding among administrators, teachers, and parents to

many of the middle school concepts, even though they are neither new nor targeted to improving the education of one group of students at the expense of others.

Information about effective research-based middle school programs should be communicated in a consistent manner throughout the state. Middle schools with proven programs should be identified in each Regional Education Service Center region to promote the diffusion of these concepts and practices. Treating these proven programs as pilots is one way to encourage this diffusion across the state.

The information needed to identify the existence of many programs on a statewide basis exists in the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) data base. The campus performance indicators system is being developed to evaluate the effectiveness of campuses based on multiple indicators. These systems can be linked to (1) identify the extent to which the recommendations of the Task Force on Middle School Education have been implemented in different types of schools, and (2) evaluate the effectiveness of those programs based on student outcomes both over time and in comparison with other campuses.

Texas Strategies for Goal 8: *Research, Development and Evaluation*

For the State Board of Education:

8.1 Develop a broad range of campus performance indicators for middle schools based on task force recommendations.

For Institutions of Higher Education:

8.2 Acknowledge the importance of practical as well as theoretical research and coordinate with the Texas Education Agency and schools in establishing a research agenda that meets the needs of practitioners. Develop research-based models for effective middle school programs to provide the basis for practical application of the results of academic research.

For the Texas Education Agency:

8.3 Consolidate the program information from pilot studies, program evaluation, the middle school resource data base, promising programs data base, dropout information data base, and other sources to facilitate centralized service as a clearinghouse of information concerning model programs for young adolescents. Establish criteria for identifying and recognizing exemplary programs. As the Texas Education Agency Electronic Information System is upgraded, explore the feasibility of making program information available to schools and Regional Education Service Centers electronically.

8.4 Develop an evaluation design for using PEIMS and other data submitted by school districts to identify middle schools that have implemented programs recommended by the task force. Integrate a range of performance indicators with this structure to provide an analysis of the programs and their impact as measured by the indicators.

8.5 Develop research-based models for effective middle school programs that can be tailored to fit local needs. Provide accompanying training and technical assistance to schools and Regional Education Service Centers.

8.6 Explore alternatives to the current assessment programs, including those that integrate the use of new technology.

For School Districts and Campuses:

8.7 Explore the use of student portfolios and other alternative assessment methods to complement the state-mandated testing program. ✦

Goal 9: *Communications*

Crucial to the success of the middle school movement in Texas is a communications network that provides middle level educators the opportunity to discuss ideas, programs, resources, and results. The three elements of this network are local middle grade schools, the Texas Middle School Association and its regional organizations, and a statewide Electronic Information Transfer System. Their continued development and interaction is essential to the widespread implementation of the strategies in this report.

Texas middle schools that have implemented many of the concepts discussed in this plan are recognized by their peers across the state. As leaders in middle school reform, they provide training and consultation to their peers. In addition to these well-known schools, middle grade teachers and principals in every part of the state know of programs on nearby campuses that have taken on the challenge of restructuring. These networks, often strictly local efforts, are both ongoing and valuable. Strengthening and supporting them at the district, Regional Education Service Center, and state levels can help provide a foundation of expertise and practice upon which a statewide middle school movement can be built.

The Texas Middle School Association is a second critical component of this communications network. The association provides an important bridge between state and local efforts with a number of regional middle level leagues and councils. These local groups showcase their own middle school programs through a series of regional meetings. These regional meetings, emphasizing local programs and providing opportunities for middle level educators to become better acquainted, are another critical component in restructuring middle level education across the state.

"It is important to understand that change takes time; we can not produce results 'yesterday'."

Catherine Cortez
Teacher
Hereford Junior High School
Hereford I S D

A "Virtual School" Operates On An Electronic Telecommunications System In Ysleta ISD

The Computer Literacy teacher at Desert View Middle School in Ysleta ISD serves as the system operator of an electronic bulletin board called the Academy. Students can log onto the Academy bulletin board to read and write both public and private electronic mail, exchange information through a wide variety of public forums, search databases for information, engage in interactive on-line chats, read lessons, and take tests. The free electronic service operates out of the teacher's home and is available 24 hours a day.

In 25 months more than 41,800 calls have been logged onto the bulletin board system. Users include students at all grade levels and college, teachers and college professors, school administrators, parents, and community members. While touting the system as a "virtual school," the computer literacy teacher at Desert View Middle School identifies several positive features of the Academy. These include: the need for all users to be literate to create, transmit, and receive electronic mail; all electronic mail responses are individualized and highly personalized; since the callers are identified only by their name and ID number, potentially negative effects caused by differences in age, gender, race, and appearance are minimized; and the system, reaching directly into students' homes, can promote parent involvement. ✦

Statewide, the Texas Middle School Association is thriving. Nearly 1,000 educators have attended its annual conference during each of the last two years. The association's board of directors, representing the regional groups, provides leadership that can complement efforts at the Regional Education Service Centers. The *Texas Middle School Association Forum* is mailed to all association members.

Middle School Electronic Communication System

Services to establish, maintain, and operate a statewide distributed electronic information transfer system called TENET, the Texas Education Network, are being procured by the Texas Education Agency. TENET will establish a wide area network that students, teachers, and administrators in school districts, Regional Education Service Centers, the Texas Education Agency, colleges and universities, and other educational and state entities can use to communicate electronically. The system will allow access to data bases of information about programs that are maintained at the Texas Education Agency.

An electronic bulletin board for middle schools, operating on the TENET system, will help promote and expedite communications among middle school educators. This communication tool will tie together the local and regional efforts.

Texas Strategies for Goal 9: *Communications*

For the Texas Education Agency

9.1 Establish patterns of communication with school districts and campuses that provide dissemination of information to both superintendents' offices and campus principals.

For Regional Education Service Centers:

9.2 Enhance regional communications networks by building upon the training and consultative services being provided through the Regional Education Service Centers and incorporating the new communications technology.

For School Districts and Campuses:

9.3 Encourage active involvement with regional middle level leagues and the state middle school association. ✦

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COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

TITLE VI, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; THE MODIFIED COURT ORDER, CIVIL ACTION 5281, FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT, EASTERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, TYLER DIVISION

Reviews of local education agencies pertaining to compliance with Title VI Civil Rights Act of 1964 and with specific requirements of the Modified Court Order, Civil Action No. 5281, Federal District Court, Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division are conducted periodically by staff representatives of the Texas Education Agency. These reviews cover at least the following policies and practices:

(1) acceptance policies on student transfers from other school districts;

(2) operation of school bus routes or runs on a non-segregated basis;

(3) nondiscrimination in extracurricular activities and the use of school facilities;

(4) nondiscriminatory practices in the hiring, assigning, promoting, paying, demoting, reassigning, or dismissing of faculty and staff members who work with children;

(5) enrollment and assignment of students without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin;

(6) nondiscriminatory practices relating to the use of a student's first language; and

(7) evidence of published procedures for hearing complaints and grievances.

In addition to conducting reviews, the Texas Education Agency staff representatives check complaints of discrimination made by a citizen or citizens residing in a school district where it is alleged discriminatory practices have occurred or are occurring.

Where a violation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is found, the findings are reported to the Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education.

If there is a direct violation of the Court Order in Civil Action No. 5281 that cannot be cleared through negotiation, the sanctions required by the Court Order are applied.

TITLE VII, CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964; EXECUTIVE ORDERS 11246 AND 11375; TITLE IX, 1973 EDUCATION AMENDMENTS; REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AS AMENDED; 1974 AMENDMENTS TO THE WAGE-HOUR LAW EXPANDING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT ACT OF 1967; AND VIETNAM ERA VETERANS READJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1972 AS AMENDED IN 1974.

It is the policy of the Texas Education Agency to comply fully with the nondiscrimination provisions of all federal and state laws and regulations by assuring that no person shall be excluded from consideration for recruitment, selection, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or any other personnel action, or be denied any benefits or participation in any programs or activities which it operates on the grounds of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, or veteran status (except where age, sex, or handicap constitute a bona fide occupational qualification necessary to proper and efficient administration). The Texas Education Agency makes positive efforts to employ and advance in employment all protected groups.

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